IN THE CLAIMS:

1.   (currently amended) A method for reconstructing an image of an object in a computed tomographic imaging system, said method comprising:

scanning an object using a computed tomographic (CT) imaging apparatus to acquire projections of the object;

determining a set of thresholds utilizing ~~said~~ the projections;

associating selected smoothing kernels with ~~said~~ the thresholds;

utilizing ~~said~~, via the computed tomographic imaging system, the smoothing kernels and ~~said~~ the projections to produce three-dimensional smoothed projections in accordance with ~~said~~ the thresholds; and

filtering and backprojecting the three-dimensional smoothed projections to generate an image of the object in the computed tomographic imaging system.

2.   (currently amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein said determining a set of thresholds comprises determining a set of four thresholds ~~comprising~~ including a high threshold, a medium threshold, a low threshold, and a very low threshold, and wherein ~~a~~ one of the smoothing ~~kernel~~ kernels is associated with each ~~said threshold~~ of the thresholds.

3.   (currently amended) A method in accordance with Claim 2 wherein a one-to-one correspondence exists between ~~said~~ the smoothing kernels and ~~said~~ the thresholds.

4.   (canceled)

5.   (currently amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein said utilizing the smoothing kernels and ~~said~~ the projections ~~to produce smoothed projections~~ comprises utilizing a smoothing gain factor to modulate smoothing of ~~said~~ the smoothed projections.

6.   (currently amended) A method in accordance with Claim 5 wherein ~~said~~ the smoothing gain factor is a function of ~~said~~ the projections.

7.–14. (canceled)

15. (currently amended) A CT imaging apparatus comprising:

a detector;

a source configured to project a beam of x-rays toward said detector; and

a computer system operatively coupled to at least one of said detector and said source, said computer system comprising:

a first module configured to scan an object to acquire projections of the object;

a second module configured to determine a set of thresholds utilizing ~~said~~ the projections;

a third module configured to associate selected smoothing kernels with ~~said~~ the thresholds;

a fourth module configured to utilize ~~said~~ the smoothing kernels and ~~said~~ the projections to produce three-dimensional smoothed projections in accordance with ~~said~~ the thresholds; and

a fifth module configured to filter and backproject the three-dimensional smoothed projections to generate an image of the object.

16. (currently amended) An apparatus in accordance with Claim 15 wherein, to determine ~~a~~ the set of thresholds, said second module is configured to determine a set of four thresholds ~~comprising~~ including a high threshold, a medium threshold, a low threshold, and a very low threshold[[,]] and to associate ~~a~~ one of the smoothing ~~kernel~~ kernels with each ~~said threshold~~ of the thresholds.

17. (currently amended) An apparatus in accordance with Claim 16 wherein ~~said~~ the smoothing kernels and ~~said~~ the thresholds exist in one-to-one correspondence.

18. (canceled)

19. (currently amended) An apparatus in accordance with Claim 15 wherein, to utilize the smoothing kernels and ~~said~~ the projections to produce the three-dimensional

smoothed projections, said fourth module is configured to utilize a smoothing gain factor to modulate smoothing of ~~said~~ the smoothed projections.

20.   (currently amended) An apparatus in accordance with Claim 19 wherein ~~said~~ the smoothing gain factor is a function of ~~said~~ the projections.

21.-28. (canceled)

29.   (currently amended) A ~~computer-readable~~ computer storage medium ~~having~~ comprising instructions thereon, said instructions configured to instruct a computer to:

determine a set of thresholds utilizing projections obtained by scanning an object;

associate selected smoothing kernels with ~~said~~ the thresholds;

utilize the smoothing kernels and ~~said~~ the projections to produce three-dimensional smoothed projections in accordance with ~~said~~ the thresholds; and

filter and backproject the three-dimensional smoothed projections to generate an image of the object.

30.   (currently amended) A ~~computer-readable~~ computer storage medium in accordance with Claim 29 wherein, to determine ~~a~~ the set of thresholds, said ~~computer-readable medium is~~ instructions are further configured to instruct the computer to determine a set of four thresholds ~~comprising~~ including a high threshold, a medium threshold, a low threshold, and a very low threshold[[,]] and to associate ~~a~~ one of the smoothing ~~kernel~~ kernels with each ~~said threshold~~ of the thresholds.

31.   (currently amended) A ~~computer-readable~~ computer storage medium in accordance with Claim 30 wherein ~~said~~ the smoothing kernels and ~~said~~ the thresholds exist in one-to-one correspondence.

32.   (canceled)

33.   (currently amended) A ~~computer-readable~~ computer storage medium in accordance with Claim 29 wherein, to utilize the smoothing kernels and ~~said~~ the projections to produce the three-dimensional smoothed projections, said ~~machine-readable medium is~~

instructions are further configured to instruct the computer to utilize a smoothing gain factor to modulate smoothing of ~~said~~ the smoothed projections.

34.   (currently amended)   A ~~computer readable~~ computer storage medium in accordance with Claim 33 wherein ~~said~~ the smoothing gain factor is a function of ~~said~~ the projections.

35.-42. (canceled)